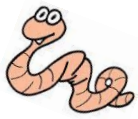
HOW TO GET YOUR COMPOST A COOKIN'



Ingredients

- ✓ Air
- ✓ Water
- ✓ Carbon (brown materials)
- ✓ Nitrogen (green materials)

Mix all these to make compost which you can use to enrich your garden.

Compost Bins

You can purchase a variety of different bins or make one out of an old plastic garbage can, a frame constructed of 2x4's, a tiered structure or plastic tumbler. If you make a wooden bin, pick a wood that is rot-resistant, such as cedar or redwood. If you use an old trash can, poke 1" holes all around the can. Your bin should be about 3' x 3' x 3' to allow enough volume for heat to build up. A lid or tarp over the compost prevents it from being waterlogged by rain and reduces evaporation in the summer. Having two bins is ideal because it allows you to shift the compost pile in stages.

Compost Bins range in size, material type and price = $0 to $300

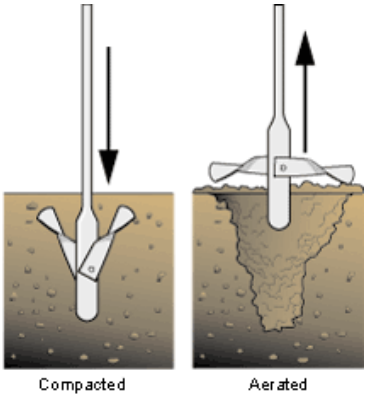
Layer Green and Brown

The best blended compost piles contain brown and green layers in a 3:1 ratio. Brown (carbon) materials include shredded leaves, chopped-up branches, wood chips, and straw. Green (nitrogen) materials include grass, kitchen scraps (no meat, dairy or bread), grass clippings, and plant trimmings.

Some suggest using a commercial fertilizer or compost starter, but it's not necessary. Mother Nature will do her thing naturally in time. One thing to hasten decomposition is to chop course or large materials before adding them to the bin.

Air and Water

To sustain the composting process, your bin needs air and water. A ventilated compost bin provides some air supply. Additionally, when you stir (or aerate) your pile you expose more material for the microbes to process and speed up the breakdown process. Stirring also prevents materials such as grass or leaves from becoming matted and smelly.



Compost Aerating Tool = $30

Use a pitchfork to turn the compost about once a week. Sprinkle water over the pile after turning or whenever you add a layer of dry materials. The pile should glisten and the contents should be as damp as a wrung-out sponge. Moisture accelerates the decomposition and creates the ideal humidity for hardworking microbes. Make the top of your compost heap concave in the center to prevent water runoff. If your compost pile becomes too wet (your clue is a rotten smell) you can remedy it by adding more dry materials (including newspaper) and turning it.

Pitchfork = $25

Hot vs. Cold Composting

Microbes = Free

Experts create compost heaps that actually steam. Steam signals that the microbial activity is at its busiest. You can check your pile with a compost thermometer. When the center reaches 140 degrees F., turn it to maintain the level of decomposition. This technique, called aerobic or oxygen-aided decay, relies on the stimulation of soil microorganisms and heat buildup caused by aeration. Quick compost, within one to three months, is the result.

Compost Thermometer = $25

There is another slower way to compost that takes less effort. "Cold" composting, anaerobic decay, or the “dump and run” method requires little work (water and turn whenever) but takes about six months to create a finished product.

Don’t Do This

Don’t add weeds, diseased plants or plants that have been sprayed with chemicals.
Don’t throw in a heap of grass clippings without mixing (could turn into a grassy brick or smell).
“When it doubt, leave it out!”

For More Info:

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